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THE SALON OF THE BARONESS DE STAËL.

From the French.

THE salon of Madame de Staël was opened to Paris during the reverses of France. The mere sight of the Cossacks crowding the streets was insupportable; so I shut myself within my house, where letters from my friends informed me of what was passing in the most fashionable drawing-rooms. One, whose profound and observing mind has revealed itself to the public in several charming works, wrote me then of having visited Madame de Staël, and described a soirée to which she had invited him. The letter will portray, better than I can, this brilliant and last salon, destined so soon, alas! to be closed for ever.

LETTER TO MADAME G———.

"PARIS, March 8—2 A. M.

"I have just returned from the soirée, and will not retire without relating to you what has so well amused me. Amuse is not the word, for the salon of Madame de Staël is not only a place where one is amused, it is also a mirror reflecting the history of the times. What one sees and hears is just as instructive as books, and gayer than the best comedy. You ask me why I read so little. Of what use is reading when life is passed in imbibing from the source of all the ideas of his time, and realizing their effect when circulated? I find her great charm lies in her ability to estimate you. And, feeling that she is judging you, every faculty is roused, seeming to borrow strength from her; for her generous mind is no niggard, but freely dispenses its treasures.

"When her daily routine is over, and her wonderful eloquence has accomplished its work, we approach her on an equality, and can then justly appreciate her friendship. At such times she yields herself to the full enjoyment of this intercourse, and with a few friends rests, appearing so entirely unrestrained that we are allowed a glance of her true nature. And what new light breaks then—what naive and beautiful confessions—making us thank God that we, also, are as she is, human!

"Sometimes she complains of the indifference of certain individuals.

"'One cannot,' said I, 'be first with everyone.'

"'But,' she replied, with a look that seemed inspired, 'how is it these people cannot love me as I love them?'

"This simple testimony showed a heart burning with divine charity, for it was a cry of grief revealing more than volumes of analysis and recital. I admire her, as the world does, but few love her as I do. Indeed, I find her beautiful, and she alone reconciles me to life in Paris. She can never be happy elsewhere, because here she finds all her nature requires. I cannot explain to you this relation, but she is far more discriminating than myself. You know that to-night, for the first time, the Duke of Wellington was to call upon her; therefore I went early to her salon, arriving even before she entered. Several of her usual guests were assembled, and the most remarkable were the Abbé de Pradt, Benjamin Constant, and Monsieur de La Fayette. They talked while I remained in a corner pretending to listen. At last Madame de Staël entered.

"'I am late!' she said to us, 'but it is not my fault, for I was invited to dine with ———, and I was obliged to go there. I was placed at the side of Fouché and of Monsieur ———. This was finding myself between the dagger and the bowl.' We cannot refrain from crying out at the originality, and, unfortunately, also, at the justice of this comparison, which was a correct definition of both.

"A great many persons filled the rooms, awaiting the hero of the evening. We had only seen his picture, and were impatient to hear him speak.

"At length Madame Recamier was announced, and she alone could recompense the mistress of the salon for *ennui* occasioned by the delay. These two conversed in low tones till the arrival of the duke.

"At last he entered, his noble appearance and simple manners agreeably impressing all. His pride, for of course he has a right to pride, has almost the grace of timidity. Indeed, Madame de Staël herself, seemed surprised by one so different from her countrymen, and exclaimed:

"'He carries glory as though it were nothing!'

"Then, with returning patriotism, she whispered to me: 'We are compelled to acknowledge that Nature never before made so great a man with so little pretension.'

"She justly described him in this sentence.

"You will realize that after this the evening passed very pleasantly. But the Duke of Wellington had not reached the end of the drawing-room when the Abbé de Pradt seized him, compelling him to listen for three-quarters of an hour to his ideas (the ideas of the Abbé de Pradt!) on military tactics. Imagine the vexation of Madame de Staël, and the weariness of everyone else. Monsieur Schlegel said that he believed the rhetorician would have discussed the art of war with Hannibal.

"This bon mot repaid us for the fatigue of hearing subjects that were so familiar talked of in good French, when we had hoped to listen to new ideas in English. Among the few words caught as they fell from the lips of the English general, there was one remark that especially struck me. For, while the abbé was catching his breath, the soldier had time to tell us that the most frightful day in the life of a commander of armies, is that on which he gains a battle; because, having passed the preceding night on the field, the constant observation on the following day, in order to assure himself of the retreat of the enemy, prevents him from, at first, realizing whether he triumphs or is defeated.

Everything has its price in this world, and if men of all ranks were to tell us their secrets, we should see that the grandest victories pay far less than they are worth. But, however this may be, I have found as much justice as good sense in the remarks of the Duke of Wellington; for we see that he seeks to excuse in us the curiosity which he feels that he inspires. A great many withdrew, discouraged by the loquacity of Monsieur de Pradt, and even the hero, himself, was about to flee, when Madame de Staël came to his rescue, and drew him near the door. There a serious conversation began on the English Constitution, for she could not connect political liberty with the servility remaining in the individual relations of a society so proud of its freedom.

"'Aristocratic language and customs do not offend people in a country really free,' said the duke. 'These forms are retained in honor of the past, and we preserve our customs with the same care that we preserve a monument which has ceased to serve its original purpose.'

"'Is it true,' said Madame de Staël, 'that your Lord Chancellor speaks to the king on his knees, during the session of parliament?

"'It is true.'

"'How does he do it?'

"'He speaks to him on his knees, I tell you!'

"'But how?'

"'Do you wish me to show you?' said the duke. And he threw himself at the feet of our Corinne.

"'I desire that all should see,' said Madame de Staël.

"And the salon applauded with one accord.

"When the guests had departed, I remained for two hours with the mistress of the house, as did Monsieur Schlegel, whose anger at the Abbé de Pradt had not yet cooled. During these hours Madame de Staël was irresistibly charming, and I felt how correct was my estimate of one who lived so near and yet so far from the world. Then with all the enthusiasm of her nature, she said: 'What happiness if one could only be a queen for twenty-four hours! What beautiful things could be said!'

"These words were repeated to my uncle, Count de Sabran.

"'She wished that the world was a salon, and she its light,' was his comment. He has also said: 'To comprehend all, you must forgive all.'

"This thought expressed and put in practice is alone worth all the pain of birth and suffering.

"It would be necessary for me to sit up many nights to relate in detail all that occurred during the evening, for there is more subject-matter in a conversation of two hours with Madame de Staël than is often found in a whole volume. To-morrow I will come and tell you what I have merely outlined in this.

"A. DE CUSTINE."

This letter has faithfully described not only the salon but the conversation of this gifted woman, of whom Madame de Tessé once said: "If I were queen I would command Madame de Staël to speak to me always."

IT is safer to affront some people than to oblige them; for the better a man deserves the worse they will speak of him.—*Seneca.*

HEARTSEASE.

OF all the bonny buds that blow
In bright or cloudy weather,
Of all the flowers that come and go
The whole twelve moons together,
This little purple pansy brings
Thoughts of the sweetest, saddest things.

I had a little lover once,
Who used to give me posies:
His eyes were blue as hyacinths,
His lips were red as roses,
And everybody loved to praise
His pretty looks and winsome ways.

The girls that went to school with me
Made little jealous speeches,
Because he brought me royally
His biggest plums and peaches,
And always at the door would wait
To carry home my books and slate.

"They couldn't see"—with pout and fling—
"The mighty fascination
About that little snub-nosed thing
To win such admiration;
As if there wern't a dozen girls
With nicer eyes and longer curls!"

And this I knew as well as they,
And never could see clearly
Why more than Marion or May
I should be loved so dearly.
So once I asked him, why was this?
He only answered with a kiss,

Until I teased him—"Tell me why—
I want to know the reason;"
When from the garden-bed close by,
(The pansies were in season)
He plucked and gave a flower to me,
With sweet and simple gravity.

"The garden is in bloom," he said,
"With lilies pale and slender,
With roses and verbenas red,
And fuschias' purple splendor;
But over and above the rest,
This little heartsease suits me best."

"Am I your little heartsease, then?"
I asked with blushing pleasure:
He answered yes! and yes again—
Heartsease, and dearest treasure;
That the round world and all the sea
Held nothing half so sweet as me!

I listened with a proud delight
Too rare for words to capture,
Nor ever dreamed what sudden blight
Would come to chill my rapture.
Could I foresee the tender bloom
Of pansies round a little tomb?

Life holds some stern experience,
As most of us discover,
And I've had other losses since
I lost my little lover;
But still this purple pansy brings
Thoughts of the saddest, sweetest things.

—*Mary E. Bradley.*

ARCHITECTURE.—I am extremely struck with what you say of architecture. It appears to me, however, that this art, unlike all others, contains something in its nature which prevents it from being, properly speaking, Art, or anything more than decoration in the highest sense of the word. Architecture alone, of all the arts, has no subject furnished by nature. To what end the most beautiful building, if it were not for use? In whatever way you consider it, the idea of utility, in the widest sense, is inseparable from this art; yet it is an idea utterly at variance with art. On the other hand, buildings give a pleasure which we should seek elsewhere in vain. As colossal works of man, the enormous mass of which is invested with a beautiful and intelligible form, they stand midway between the productions of nature—mountains, rocks, etc., and the mere offspring of the human fancy, statues, and combine the advantages of both. Even the idea of utility, which instantly attracts men, perhaps conspires to produce this result; so mixed, it appears to me, is the *common* impression which a building makes. The *artistical* impression is, indeed, very different; but even this cannot be perfectly pure; and the question remains, whether architecture is to be treated as a perfectly pure art, and utility to be sacrificed. Hardly, I think. The utmost it can attain to is, it seems to me, the æsthetic treatment of a subject belonging to a totally different domain. This however applies only to ornamental architecture.—*Wilhelm von Humboldt.*